



Ronald Petronella  
President UFCW Local 371  
Labor & Public Employees Committee Public Hearing  
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## **SB 938 AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT FOR STRIKING WORKERS**

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Ackert, and the distinguished members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is Ronald Petronella. I live in Norwalk and I am the President of the UFCW Local 371. We represent 7,000 members in retail, healthcare, gaming, transportation, and food processing in Connecticut and Massachusetts. I am sorry I am unable to be with you in person, as I am out of state at a meeting about our pension plan. Thank you for reading my statement in support of SB 938.

I have been President of this Local for only a couple of years, but I am proud to have been a member since 1977. In that time, I have been part of three strikes. One was at Pathmark for twenty-seven days. One was at Stop and Shop for less than one day, and one, most recently, was at Stop and Shop for eleven days. That's thirty-nine days of strikes in forty-six years. We don't take striking lightly. We know our ability to bargain a good contract rests in the strength of our membership. We know our members remain strong because they know we have their backs and won't lead them to take a job action unless we are left with no other choice. In April of 2019, faced with the decimation of our pension and health and welfare benefits, and an unacceptable wage proposal, we knew we had no choice, and we had to take a stand.

The pictures of the thousands of Local 371 and Local 919 members streaming out of their stores in the spring of '19, emptying every store in Connecticut in seventeen minutes, is something I will never forget. The pride in my union family will stick with me forever, but so will the weight of our decision to lead them to walk out.

The reason Connecticut workers who go on strike are unable to collect unemployment benefits is because they are presumed to have left their jobs voluntarily. No worker takes the decision to go on strike lightly, and service and retail workers, who often live paycheck to paycheck, take that decision even more seriously than others. I assure you, once a worker ends up at the decision to strike, after months of bargaining, the decision to leave their employment is anything other than voluntary.

We were able to secure a good contract for our members that year, and we were able to fend off the concessions presented by the employer. However, if we had been able to hold out just a bit longer, I believe we would have an even stronger contract today. We had to balance our members' ability to pay their bills in the present with the strength of their contract in the future. Unemployment is not a living. No one would stay out on strike needlessly because they are collecting unemployment benefits. However, it would have allowed our members to maybe not have needed to rely on the foodbank and other social services to care for their families, and it would have allowed them to recover economically a lot sooner.

New York and New Jersey already allow striking workers to collect unemployment benefits. SB 938 follows the example set by our neighboring states. We urge the Committee to support this bill.